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**UD PROFESSOR QUESTIONS AUTHOR'S CLAIM THAT CHILDREN'S
PERSONALITIES ARE INFLUENCED MORE BY PEERS THAN BY PARENTS**

MANY INFLUENCES AFFECT PERSONALITY — Are children's personalities formed more by their friends than by their families?

Author Judith Rich Harris, whose recently released book *The Nurture Assumption* has been the subject of stories in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The New Yorker*, attempts to prove this theory. But Judith Allik, a University of Dayton associate professor of psychology, says the argument is not an "either/or" proposition.

"There is good evidence that experiences that occur outside the family environment really do make a significant impact on children," says Allik, a clinical psychologist who specializes in child and adolescent behavior. "But not just experiences with one's peers — children are influenced by their schools, teachers, by their gender and order within a family."

Allik says "non-shared experiences" have an even greater influence on a child's personality than the experiences they share with their brothers and sisters. In other words, siblings can have the same mom and dad and different experiences inside and outside the home.

For example, Allik says, one sibling may have a kindergarten or first-grade teacher who is "supportive, enthusiastic and helpful" while another may have one who is "negative, hostile and punitive." These different experiences can "have an obvious impact on a child's attitude toward school and learning." Further, Allik says, parents do not treat each of their children the same; therefore, many of a child's experiences within the family differ from those of his or her siblings.

"Do friends have an impact? Of course they do," Allik says. "But it is important not to oversimplify. Having supportive, loving parents, and open communication with them, has a significant positive effect on a child's functioning through adolescence and probably beyond. And it is important not to lose sight of that fact that our personalities are also influenced by our genes."

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